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EDUCATIONAL METHODS.

SINCE the differences and divergencies in personality are almost as diverse and multiplicative as the atoms comprising the universe, there can be only foolhardiness and failure in any attempt at formulating a general system for mental training. None, however generous, can be made sufficiently catholic to cope with recognizable needs. Schools and colleges, except in a few isolated cases, can, at best, only lay the foundation of what may, afterward, by individual effort, become sound and practical mental culture.

Each person has tastes, aspirations, and needs, which are peculiar to that person. No two persons were ever exactly alike, physically—a fact which every one who thinks at all must readily grant. And close scrutiny and comparison would soon convince the veriest skeptic that these outward dissimilarities are even much greater than casual observance makes them seem. Yet, the man who would accept this truth concerning physical differences, without criticism or challenge, would do combat against any one who dared declare that there were still vaster and wider mental divergencies. This latter fact is rarely, if ever, taken into earnest consideration by those to whom the culture of undeveloped minds is intrusted. Young people who are the offspring of such antagonistic or otherwise markedly varying classes that they cannot, possibly, hold any aim, interest, or ambition in common, are, when it comes to a matter of mental training, melted, as it were, and then run into the same mold.

The process is like that of raveling a large number of shawls, mixing the fibres, and then weaving the whole mass of material into one tremendous piece of goods. The total weight is unchanged, and there are, also, the same number of square feet of woven goods. Cut them up, if you like, into the same number of shawls you originally had,—but here the merest semblance of the former condition of things is at an end. Each shawl is like its former self

only in size and weight. The respective personality of each is destroyed ; each retaining only in part the elements which lent it distinction from the others ; neither possessing any attribute which all the others cannot also boast. All are now brought upon nearly a common level, but originality is slain, and there is general demoralization.

Some of the shawls, in the beginning, were of cotton ; some were of linen ; some were of fine silk. The proportion of silk was less than that of linen, and that of linen less than that of cotton. So the value of the shawls of silk was most harmed. In each shawl, now, there is a preponderance of cotton, a wee bit of silk, and a quantity of linen about midway between the two. The coarser substance loses, rather than gains by contrast, by its alliance with the finer ; and the other, the linen, is about equally harmed by the splendor of the one and the meanness of the other. The silk is marred and tarnished by both.

In their primal condition, as silk, linen, and cotton, each had a place and a value in the economy of life ; contact, association, amalgamation, have so wrought upon the elements which accorded value to each, in the abstract, that neither have practical worth now until the separation of respective particles is again made, and each is once more resolved into something as near as possible like its primal condition of individuality.

But there is still something to be deplored : the cotton is no longer content to be its humble self, having been companion with the linen and the silk ; the linen, permeated with the fibre of the cotton, and dazzled with the lustre of the silk, laments that it is neither the one nor the other, but a mere convenient medium between the two instead ; while in the silk there still hangs and lingers the common odor of the linen and the cotton.

Children born into one sphere are constantly and persistently being reminded of their utter unlikeness to the children of all other spheres, except in matters of education : croaking and moralizing are perpetually given to matters of little moment, compared with mental training, wherein their ways are different from the ways of others. Food, dress, deportment—really all things of minor consideration—are taken gravely into account ; but, when it comes to shaping processes of thought, there is no radical difference between the training of the son of a king and the son of a peasant, or the son of a savant and the son of a mechanic. Socially,

in matters of taste, in every other thing but this one thing, it is admitted that there is, between them, not only no sympathy, but the most imperfect resemblance ; while in this, perhaps the most vital of all of their manifold interests, it seems to be taken for granted that they are met upon one plane.

More particularly, however, than to class distinctions, do I refer to the more important—because more dangerous—degrees, conditions, and differences of mentality.

It is granted, with the utmost readiness, that in matured and developed minds there exists an element, which, for want of a more clearly descriptive term, we call individuality. In young people, on the other hand, it seems to be the generally accepted conclusion that the existence of this characteristic is impossible. When individuality, however, *is* recognized in youth, it rarely meets with anything else than the most unflagging and tireless efforts to destroy and quench it—as if it was a thing so terrible and sinister that it menaced church, state, and all great and high human interests.

The sole aim and object seems to be to make something else of the youthful mind than that which it really is. A gentle, sensitive child, of dreamy, poetic temperament, and modest reticence, is scoffed, sneered, and bullied into an artificial creature of coldness and indifference. If he is modest, no effort is left unmade to break in upon that. If he is independent and fearless, battle is done for the breaking and subversion of his will. The paramount purpose, as I have already said, is, if one may be permitted to pass judgment upon what is, on every hand, plainly before one's eyes, to obliterate, wherever it may be existent, every spark, gleam, and trace of individuality and originality.

While this, of course, is not really the purpose of instructors, it is, in most cases, the main result of their labor. Instructors are not, of themselves, so vastly wrong ; the system which they follow is where the fault is, and this cannot be changed until more than one hand is uplifted against it.

The very thought of class-drill or instruction, which is wholly incorrect, is in itself abominable and abhorrent to any thinking youth. The forcing of common studies after a general fashion, upon all children, is the blackest crime of the intellectual world. It is a kind of murder—far worse, too, than that which is generally called murder, since *that* mercifully releases the mind from

the hampering flesh, and is the ending, rather than the beginning, of misery.

The hardest, bitterest, and most degenerating task that is the lot of every man and woman, is the unlearning in maturer years of the bulk of that which is taught them as children, and the shaking off, too, of the hindering and obstructing manacles of system, fashion, and method. The emancipator of man and woman from this most direful, unbearable, and disastrous of all bondage, will win for himself more lasting glory than has yet been awarded to any emancipator of other slaves.

But all the wrong is not with the educational system. The social system is also at fault. It is here, in fact, where most of the wrong and evil lie ; it is here where they start ; it is here where the first wrong step is taken ; it is here whence sanction, encouragement, promulgation are drawn. Parents direct the feet of children into paths which lead into something worse than the Valley of Death.

The parental intent is honest, grand—even magnanimous and sublime ; but its attributes, great and noble as they are, dwindle into senseless abjection before the awful force and sway of custom. In blind adherence to method, and in the still blinder hope that its workings will, after all, set everything straight in the end, fathers and mothers begin, abet, and enforce upon their children the very rigmarole which perplexed and embittered their own youthful days. They, in the light of matured reason, suffer those who are sprung from them to sweat and smart in the taking up of burdens, which, in after years, can only be put down with grief and vexation. “Our parents,” they argue, “did this thing for us, because it was best. If it was right for us, it must also be right for our children.” The world is old, but it is not so very wise, after all.

In a single family are three sons. One has tastes and inclinations toward being an artisan ; another is enraptured by the sublimities of theology, and the third, being most strongly appealed to by nature, bows before the shrine of art.

Beyond the merest rudiments and principles, they have, because of dissimilarity of their tastes, no educational needs in common. And yet, each is forced to enter and go through the same treadmill. The artist is driven through a perplexing course of mathematics ; the artisan, all because of custom and precedent,

must distract and bewilder himself with ethics, and the theologian's sacred studies are broken in upon with much which is quite as foreign to his purposes and uses. It is the silk, the linen and the cotton all over again ; that is all. Each imbibes much which the manner of his life compels him, sooner or later, to discard.

The pursuit of unnecessary studious research and investigation is not only a waste of energy and time, but it not unfrequently brings about the inception and evolution of new traits and elements in a student's nature which, in some measure, spoils all the world for him.

A man or woman whose lines happen to be cast where there is no occasion for their taking any part in the great business and machinery of the universe, can, perhaps, afford to follow time-honored customs, and stem the formidable tide of studies which every one is expected to master in some degree. But he or she whose fate it is to take an active part in human affairs cannot, logically, give any portion of the time set apart for preparation to that which can never be of any actual value in the sphere for which preparation is made.

A practical education, as things are now ordered, can only be acquired by private study and special application, long after one's school-days are done. It is then that a full realizing sense of the shallow and superficial inadequacy of mental training, according to present standards, is first arrived at. In the abstract, I have no plans to suggest. I can only deplore the unhappy condition of things.

Those who make a business of mental training may, if they choose, be able to make a practical application of what I have scarcely more than hinted at. Wedded as they are, however, to custom and habit, it is doubtful if they will do aught else than sneer at what they will, most likely, call an old woman's vagaries. Yet, the day will come when individual needs will determine and shape all of that which in any way pertains to the education of immature and undeveloped men and women. It cannot be otherwise. I doubt that the world will always stand still in this respect, any more than it has always stood still in other respects.

If, as men argue, and as I, also, believe, this is a progressive age, progress must eventually affect this, as much as it has already affected other departments in life. Individual needs must wield a swaying power at last. The time is bound to come when

the recognition and fostering of distinctly characteristic traits is made the first and gravest consideration of those to whose lot the education of the young falls.

The only reason of this long and awful night is because the absurdity of it has not yet been seen. Whenever the eyes of the blind old world are opened to anything considerable, changes are quickly made.

In the face and eyes of countless other reforms, wherein the abandonment of old customs came about, this hideous relic of barbarism remains. Its record is a record of crimes against the Giver of the Law which bade man do all things with his might. It has made the soldier a priest, and the priest a knave. It has made the artist a tradesman, and the sailor a merchant. It has sapped genius and suckled artificiality. It has, everywhere, stunted, dwarfed, slaughtered the best, and nourished, fed, and applauded the worst. And its awful carnage-dyed wheels must yet dissever many another fair neck before the appetite of the monster who drives the sacrificial car is sated.

To ask the mason to learn the trade of the painter would be counted absurd; to command the farmer to master the craft of the iron-founder, as an essential step, preparatory to learning the management of his crops, would merit the same characterization. And yet the same thing, this same acquiring of the valueless and the unnecessary, is constantly going on wherever mental training is essayed.

It is argued that the study of these cumbering elements and branches is essential to the development of the mind. It is also admitted that the exhaustion of any one branch of knowledge is a practical impossibility. Since mental development is, of course, a result of study, what matters it whether few or many branches are employed for this purpose? Why not bend all of one's energies upon the investigation of the branches which are to play large parts in one's life, ignoring anything beyond an elementary knowledge of the others? The chemist does not need a knowledge of horse-shoeing, nor the botanist a knowledge of surgery. Why, then, should the best years of every one's life be thus foolishly and aimlessly frittered away in the pursuit of the useless and the irrelevant?

GEORGE SAND.